WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. In a computing environment, a method comprising:

(a) communicating a content-related request, and in response, receiving download regulation data corresponding to an acceptance value and a time-window set containing at least one time value;

(b) determining based on a current acceptance value whether to request the content or whether to back off for a wait time before requesting the content, the wait time corresponding to a time value in the time-window set; and

(i) when the determination result is to request the content, downloading the content for a download time, the download time corresponding to a time value in the time-window set, and

(ii) when the determination result is to back off, delaying downloading of the content for the wait time.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein the time value is the same for the download time and the wait time.

3. The method of claim 1 wherein receiving download regulation data corresponding to an acceptance value and a time-window set comprises receiving a URL to a download regulation file.

4.   The method of claim 1 wherein determining whether to request the content or whether to back off comprises, generating a random number and comparing the random number with a number corresponding to the acceptance value.

5.   The method of claim 1 wherein the determination result is to back off, and wherein after delaying downloading of the content for the wait time, further comprising repeating (a) and (b).

6.   The method of claim 1 wherein the determination result is to download, wherein the content is not completely downloaded within the download time, and further comprising repeating (a) and (b) at least once to resume downloading until the download is complete.

7.   The method of claim 1 further comprising setting the wait time corresponding to a time value in the time-window set by obtaining the time value from the time-window set and varying the obtained time value by a random time amount.

8.   The method of claim 1 further comprising setting the download time corresponding to a time value in the time-window

set by obtaining the time value from the time-window set and varying the obtained time value by a random time amount.

9. The method of claim 1 wherein the determination result is to back off, and wherein after delaying downloading of the content for the wait time, further comprising, obtaining another acceptance percentage value from the download regulation data, setting that other acceptance percentage value as the current acceptance percentage value, and repeating step (b).

10. A computer-readable medium having computer-executable instructions, which, when executed, perform the method of claim 1.

11. In a computing environment, a method of regulating access to content, comprising:

receiving a content-related request, and in response, providing download regulation data comprising at least one probability value that directs which clients can download, wherein access to the content is regulated by clients determining from the probability value whether to download the content or wait until later to download the content; and

updating the download regulation data based on network load.

12. The method of claim 11 further comprising providing in the download regulation data a time-window set containing at least one time value.

13. The method of claim 12 wherein the time window set contains a delay time specifying for at least how long clients that determine to wait are to delay.

14. The method of claim 12 wherein the time window set contains a download time specifying for at most how long clients that determine to download may download.

15. The method of claim 11 wherein each probability value corresponds to a percentage, and wherein access to the content is regulated by clients determining from the probability value whether they meet a threshold based on the percentage.

16. The method of claim 11 wherein the download regulation data contains at least first and second probability values, and wherein clients that have not waited determine

from the first probability value whether to download or wait, and clients that have waited determine from the second probability value whether to download or further wait.

5   17.   The method of claim 11 wherein updating the download regulation data based on network load comprises obtaining information corresponding to regional load, and wherein providing download regulation data comprises clients with a download regulation data file corresponding to each client's

10   region.

18.   A computer-readable medium having computer-executable instructions, which, when executed, perform the method of claim 11.

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19.   A computer-readable medium having stored thereon a data structure, comprising:

     a first set of data corresponding to an acceptance value;

     a second set of data corresponding to a time value; and

20   wherein the data structure is returned to a client in response to a content-related request, and the client determines from the acceptance value in the first set of data whether to request the content or whether to back off for a

wait time before requesting the content, the wait time

corresponding to a time value in the second set of data.

20. In a computer network having unmanaged clients, a

5   system comprising:

means for determining whether a software update is

needed;

means for requesting the software update when needed;

means for receiving a download regulation file in

10   response to the request for the software update; and

means for processing the download regulation file to

determine whether to download the software update or wait

until a later time to download the software update, including

means for generating a random number and means for comparing

15   the random number against an acceptance value in the download

regulation file.